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10 June 1965

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT : Ambassador Taylor's Briefing on Vietnam

REFERENCE : USIB-M-392, Item 1, 9 June 1965

1. The Chairman opened the 9 June meeting of the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) in a limited attendance session by introducing Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and expressing his pleasure that the Ambassador could appear before the Board.

2. Ambassador Taylor commented that, rather than making a general statement which might repeat information already well known or otherwise available to the Board, he would prefer to open the meeting to questions. In the course of the subsequent question and answer session the Ambassador's comments included the following points:

a. The desertion rate among the regular South Vietnamese armed forces is down somewhat, but is still much too high; approximately 5,000 deserted in February as compared to 3,500 in May. In addition, Regional Force desertions have averaged about 1,200 per month and Popular Force desertions about 5,000 per month. Besides the indication of poor morale the desertion rate contributed to a military manpower shortage in South Vietnam which is further complicated by the steady increase in Communist strength. This high desertion rate plus battle losses has resulted in a net increase of only 11,000 in the South Vietnamese armed forces since February despite great efforts to develop more manpower. The result has been that General Westmoreland, instead of forming new ARVN battalions, has shifted his efforts to filling up the existing understrength units. The understrength condition of ARVN units has contributed to their poor performance in several cases, i. e., in a recent major engagement in Quang Ngai Province. Ambassador Taylor noted that great efforts are being made to reduce the desertion rate and expressed hope that the downward trend would

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continue. It was also noted that the data on desertions are shaky and inadequate and that it is not clear from available data, for example, how many of the men eventually return to their own or other South Vietnamese military units.

b. Premier Quat's request on 9 June to the military to mediate his dispute with Chief of State Suu and other opponents regarding the reshuffle of the South Vietnamese Cabinet can be interpreted as a retreat from Quat's position of last week. The generals, who have been reluctant to intervene, probably will not formally re-establish the Armed Forces Council although this would be the net effect of their activities in response to Quat's request.

c. Catholics originally from North Vietnam and southern old-guard type of politicians (residents of the part of South Vietnam formerly called Cochin China) make up the core of the opposition to Premier Quat, although native southern Catholics are also now opposing him. The southern politicians are motivated by political and regional considerations and the Catholics have been suspicious of Quat's administration from the beginning since he was put in office by the Buddhists. The army and the Buddhists still appear to support Premier Quat.

d. It is most difficult to understand the South Vietnamese refusal to postpone their internal squabbles in the face of the common enemy. Even the requirement for survival does not seem to be a unifying factor.

e. The air attacks on North Vietnam have not yet shaken Hanoi because the North Vietnamese leaders are tough people, not easily shaken by this type of pressure. Nevertheless the air attacks are doing a job and doing it well. The attacks have a mounting effect, and an escalation of pressure can be achieved by continuing to do the same thing over and over. The attacks have changed the way of life in North Vietnam and the pain of war is no longer so one-sided. Furthermore the raids provide a valuable negotiating counter. In short, the bombing program has paid off.

f. The North Vietnamese are not prepared to come to the conference table at this time because the situation in the south still looks favorable to them. Hanoi will be induced to negotiate only when the tide begins to turn in the south. Air attacks on the north will not alone achieve negotiations. What is needed is slowly mounting air pressure on North

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Vietnam and time to redress the balance in South Vietnam; given enough time this can be done.

g. Captured Viet Cong documents have been useful, and particularly a regimental field order which illustrated the following points:

- (1) The correct estimates of ARVN strength indicate good intelligence.
- (2) Communist military operations are being directed by a first-class professional mind.
- (3) The Communist goal of the summer offensive is to decimate as many regular ARVN ground combat units as possible.

h. The danger of Chinese intervention does not appear close at present so long as the US continues to do essentially what it is doing now. We would be in the danger area if we mounted major air attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong complex.

i. Ambassador Taylor would be surprised if we do not see more regular North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam in the near future.

j. US troops in South Vietnam can be used in four possible ways:

- (1) Static defense of fixed installations.
- (2) To move out from the installations with patrols in order to ensure control of the environment around the installation at least so far as the range of enemy weapons.
- (3) To use those US units not essential to static defense as mobile groups to throw into a battle which has already been joined between Communist and ARVN forces. The US troops to be withdrawn following the battle.
- (4) To use US troops to control an area of South Vietnam with the same mission and problems which ARVN troops now have.

The Ambassador commented that of these four, the first two were being done and the third would be done now. He was not in favor of the fourth method of using US troops.

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k. Communist successes in the south are due in large part to logistic and manpower support from North Vietnam.


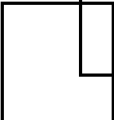
l. To date there are no indications that increased US involvement has encouraged the South Vietnamese to slacken their own war effort. Ambassador Taylor said that this may be a problem for the future, but that he believed that US sources would provide ample warning of such a development.

m. Every effort should be made to warn the Soviet Union that we will not allow them to build up a major power base in North Vietnam.

n. The use of B-52's in South Vietnam for carpet bombing might be useful, but it would not directly affect the course of the war.

3. The Chairman concluded the substantive discussion by commenting that the use of B-52's might help demonstrate to all concerned the strong US determination in South Vietnam, although it would also cause us trouble outside the Communist world.

4. Chairman Raborn then expressed his and the Board's deepest appreciation to Ambassador Taylor for taking the time to present his most useful and informative views to the Board.


 Executive Secretary

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